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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN MEDIA REACTION: AUGUST 12, 2009

Summary: Reports on the killing of "at least 10 militants in a drone attack in South Waziristan" dominated headlines in all newspapers on Wednesday. Newspapers also highlighted reports that the "Taliban militants blew up eight schools in Buner district (NWFP)" where children recently resumed their studies after the area was declared safe by the Pakistan Army. Some speculative reports about the additional staffing and the expansion of the U.S. Mission in Pakistan continued to garner media attention. Foreign Office spokesman's statement that the Pakistan "government has so far received no formal request or indication from the U.S. government about for any massive increase the strength of marines" received prominent coverage. Several major newspapers also highlighted the Pakistan Army's spokesman statement repudiating Indian media reports about the alleged Taliban attacks on Pakistan's nuclear assets as terming "factually incorrect and part of typical propaganda campaign to malign Pakistan." Also, the Pentagon spokesman's remarks that "U.S. (was) comfortable with the Pakistani security measures" were also highlighted.

Most major newspapers ran editorials on different political issues. However, some dailies editorialized the reconstruction of the militancy-hit Swat with special reference to the Prime Minister Gilani's recent visit to the area. Commenting on the security situation in Swat, the center-right national English daily "The Nation," underlined that "completely rooting out the menace of extremism by itself is a challenging task, let alone the sustained effort required to undo the damage their acts of brutality caused." The populist, and often sensational national English daily "The News" opined that the "task is not yet finished. The fact is that militants remain active in Swat." Criticizing the proposed expansion plan of the U.S. Mission in Pakistan, the Lahore-based populist center-right Urdu daily "Khabrain" maintained that the "arrival of U.S. Marines will pose a threat to Pakistan's nuclear assets due to the close proximity." End Summary.

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News Stories  
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"10 Taliban Killed In Drone Attack" "Dawn" (08/12)

"A U.S. drone fired missiles into a suspected Taliban hideout in the Sam area of South Waziristan on Tuesday, killing 10 militants. An official said the house attacked on Tuesday was owned by Abdur Rahim Berki known to have links with the Baitullah Mehsud group and served as a training facility."

"Eight Schools Blown Up In Buner" "The News" (08/12)

"The Taliban militants blew up eight government schools in Chagharzai area in Buner district (NWFP) in the wee hours of Tuesday, sources said."

"U.S. To Use Funds For Aid On 'Super Embassy' Project" "Dawn" (08/12)

"In what could be a recipe for a new controversy, the United States will spend nearly one billion dollars from its \$2.4 billion war supplement aid for Pakistan on the construction and fortification of its new embassy in Islamabad and additional staffing of the mission, in what is seen here as a departure from the usual practice of using State Department finances for such projects. Under a program to strengthen its presence in Pakistan, the U.S. will bring here about 1,000 personnel, including a large number of Marines. The U.S. plan to reinforce its presence has already created ripples here and, according to a senior official, it would mean stationing of 'more American military and intelligence personnel in diplomatic guise.'"

"No U.S. Request For 1,000 Marines In Islamabad: FO" "The News" (08/12)

"The government has not received any formal request from the U.S. for any massive increase the strength of marines to secure premises of its Embassy in Islamabad where currently around 20 marines are deployed, according to diplomatic sources. There is no basis to the assertions in various media reports that hundreds of U.S. marines and Armored Personnel Carriers (APCs) will be landing in Islamabad soon to guard the American Mission here, maintain spokespersons of both the Foreign Office and the U.S. Embassy."

"Petition Filed In Sindh High Court Against Construction Of Residences For Additional Troops In U.S. Embassy" "Islam," "Express," "Waqt" (08/12)

"A local lawyer has filed a constitutional petition in the Sindh High Court against the construction of residences of 7,500 U.S. soldiers. The Federation of Pakistan, Chief of Army Staff and the U.S. Ambassador have been made respondents in the petition. The petitioner has taken stand that the stationing of soldiers is violation of the Diplomatic Relations 1961, and Vienna Conventions 1963. The building of an embassy cannot be used for any activity which is against the international diplomatic norms, and such use is also prohibited according to the Pakistan's Diplomatic and Consular's Privilege Act 1072. The petitioner Sohail Hameed Advocate has prayed the court to stop the respondents from doing so."

"U.S. Diplomat Declared Persona Non Grata, Claims Private TV Channel; Foreign Office And U.S. Embassy Deny" "Express," "Jang" (08/12)

"A private TV channel has claimed that the Pakistan Foreign Office has declared a U.S. diplomat [based in Peshawar] persona non grata and told to leave the country. However, the U.S. Embassy has said that no diplomat of the U.S. Consulate in Peshawar is engaged in anti-Pakistan activities nor is there any diplomat by the name of Stephen Cash at the Consulate in Peshawar. U.S. Embassy Spokesman Richard Snelsire said that the Embassy was in touch with the Foreign Office and we did not get any information [about a diplomat being declared persona non grata], nor has anyone been issued a notice to leave the country. The U.S. Consulate in Peshawar has also denied such reports. Moreover, Foreign Office Spokesman Abdul Basit has also declared this report baseless and said that no such notification or order has been issued, nor has any such incident taken place."

"Attacks On N-Facilities - D.G. ISPR Rejects Report" "The Nation" (08/12)

"Pakistan on Tuesday rejected some foreign media reports claiming that extremists and terrorists had attacked its nuclear facilities at least thrice over the last two years. 'It is rubbish. These aspersions are factually incorrect and are part of typical propaganda campaign to malign Pakistan,' Pakistan Army's chief spokesman Major General Athar Abbas told 'The Nation.'"

"Pentagon Comfortable With Pak N-Safety Steps" "The News" (08/12)

"The Pentagon on Tuesday reaffirmed its confidence in the safety of Pakistan's nuclear assets with a Press Secretary Geoff Morrell saying he was not aware of any Taliban attacks on the South Asian country's nuclear installations, reported in the Indian media earlier in the day."

"U.S. Actually Worried About What The Pakistani's Thinks?" "The News" (08/12)

"The United States, concerned over its negative image in Pakistan as reflected in a recent poll, Monday reaffirmed Washington's pledge to help see off the key South Asian nation's economic and security challenges. 'Well, I saw that poll, and it's obviously very concerning. We clearly have a lot of work to do,' Deputy spokesman at the State Department Robert Wood said at the daily briefing."

"U.S. Congress Urged To Expedite Passage Of Kerry-Lugar Bill" "Daily Times" (08/12)

"The New York Times, a leading U.S. newspaper on Tuesday has stated that Baitullah Mehsud's killing represented 'some success' of President Barack Obama's military policy for Pakistan and called for an early Congressional passage of the long-promised bill tripling economic and development assistance to the South Asian country."

"Interior Minister Rejects TTP Claim" "Dawn" (08/12)

"Interior Minister Rehman Malik on Tuesday rejected a claim made by Hakeemullah Mehsud that Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan chief Baitullah Mehsud was still alive, calling for supporting evidence. The minister told a press conference: 'We have credible and substantial evidence that Baitullah Mehsud is dead. Hakeemullah Mehsud's statement is insufficient.'"

"Mehsud To Appear Before Media Soon" "The Nation" (08/12)

"The spokesman of defunct Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Maulvi Omar, on Tuesday claimed that TTP Chief Baitullah Mehsud was alive and would appear before the media either in person or through videotape within next few days to negate the government claims of his death."

"Militants Will Not Be Allowed To Regroup: Zardari" "The News" (08/12)

"President Asif Ali Zardari said the Malakand plan should result in increased security with improved system of governance in which the potential of the region was fully exploited for economic growth and the region was made a secure, prosperous and tolerant place free from the dangers of militancy. The President said the objective of the plan required that militants were not allowed to regroup."

"Malakand Operation Cost Nation Billions Of Rupees" "The News" (08/12)

"Pakistan's defence spending increased by around Rs 30 billion in the fiscal ending June 30, 2009, due to the military operation in the Malakand Division to flush out the militants, Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin said while talking to reporters in Islamabad on Tuesday."

"People Displaced By Fresh Fighting In NWFP: UN" "Dawn" (08/12)

"Some 765,000 out of more than two million displaced people in Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province have now returned to their homes, but continued fighting is causing a fresh round of displacement, according to the United Nations humanitarian body."

"Militants Killing Militants: 21 Dead" "The News" (08/12)

"About 21 militants were killed and 12 others were taken hostage as two insurgent groups clashed over a dispute started by an incidence of body search at a Taliban established check-point in Shahokhel and Ghaljo areas in Orakzai Agency."

"Four Militants Die In 18-Hour-Long Kabal Action" "The News" (08/12)

"Security forces, during an 18-hour-long operation in Akhund Killay in Kabal Tehsil of Swat, killed a militant commander and three others and showed their corpses to the media Mingora on Tuesday. Briefing reporters, in charge of the ISPR media cell, Swat, Lt-Col Akhtar, said the militants had taken positions in bunkers at the hilltops while personnel of security forces had to move into the area by boats."

"17 Militants Dead After Rocket Attack" "The News" (08/12)

"In an operation, paramilitary forces on Tuesday killed at least 17 militants in a tribal area after militants rockets killed two civilians in Peshawar city, a paramilitary statement said. 'It said a large quantity of arms and ammunition has been captured and troops destroyed one ammunition dump and six militant hideouts.'"

"17 Militants Killed In Bara: FC" "Dawn" (08/12)

"Security forces used helicopter gunships in an offensive against the banned Lashkar-i-Islam in Bara subdivision on Tuesday, killing 17 militants and destroying six hideouts of militants, the Frontier Corps Media Cell said."

"Govt. Decides To Restructure ISI" "The News" (08/12)

"The government has decided to restructure the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) to make it more efficient and vibrant, well placed sources in the Ministry of Defence told 'The News.'"

"Khan Of Kalat Ups The Ante" "Dawn" (08/12)

"The Khan of Kalat, Mir Suleman Dawood, announced on Tuesday formation of a council for 'independent Balochistan' and rejected any reconciliation with the government of Pakistan without the mediation of European Union and United Nations. Addressing reporters from London on telephone, he said the council would ensure the creation of an independent state of Balochistan."

"FC Cuts Short Balochistan 'I-Day' Celebrations" "Daily Times" (08/12)

"The Frontier Corps (FC) arrested on Tuesday dozens of political activists all over the province who were celebrating August 11 as 'Balochistan independence day,' The celebrations had been organized on a call by Khan of Kalat Mir Suleman Dawood - who designated August 11 as 'Balochistan independence day,' and said August 14 should be observed as a 'black day.'"

"U.S. Ready For Reconciliation With Rank-And-File Taliban" "Dawn" (08/12)

"The top commander of U.S. and NATO forces in Afghanistan on Tuesday vowed his troops would prevail in the war and said he was open to reconciling with rank-and-file Taliban. 'We will win. The Taliban won't win. But we will also have to deal through good and bad days, and good and bad months,' Gen. Stanley McChrystal told U.S. National Public Radio."

"Provinces Warned About Sipah-e-Sahaba: Minister" "Dawn" (08/12)

"The government told the National Assembly on Tuesday it had asked provinces to keep a watch on the banned Sipah-e-Sahaba group, which is accused of fomenting recent violence in the Punjab province's Jhang and Gojra towns."

"Musharraf Faces Arrest On Return" "Daily Times" (08/12)

"Former President Pervez Musharraf will face arrest if he returns to Pakistan after police registered a case against him on Tuesday over his detention of judges during 2007, said Hakam Khan, head of a Police Station in Islamabad where the case was lodged."

"U.K. Diplomat Starts Talks To 'Protect' Musharraf" "Dawn" (08/12)

"Senior British diplomat Mark Lyall Grant, Director, Political affairs at the British Foreign Office on Tuesday started talks with Pakistan's top political leaders, triggering speculations that he

might be seeking concessions for former President Gen. Pervez Musharraf, who faces a possible trial for high treason."

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Editorials/Op-eds  
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"Challenging Task Ahead," an editorial in the center-right national English daily "The Nation" (cir. 20,000) (08/12)

"While the Prime Minister's reaffirmation to reconstruct the militancy-hit Malakand Division is welcome, it is pertinent to stress that the job should be taken up in all earnestness and without loss of time.... To fulfill Mr. Gilani's promises, the authorities would have to demonstrate deep commitment. Completely rooting out the menace of extremism by itself is a challenging task, let alone the sustained effort required to undo the damage their acts of brutality caused."

"Settling Swat," an editorial in the populist, often sensational national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (08/12)

"The Prime Minister, on his first visit to Swat since displaced persons began to return there, told a gathering of elders that a special package would soon be announced for the area.... But the task is not yet finished. The fact is that militants remain active in Swat. According to some accounts, clandestine radio stations spring back occasionally to life; militant commanders mete out threats to people through messages and fear still hangs over the mountains.... Rather than simply announcing plans for them, these people need to be drawn into the decision-making process. They must have some say in deciding what the most urgent needs of the area are and how they can be best met."

"Swat Situation," an editorial in the Lahore-based liberal English daily "The Post" (cir. 5,000) (08/12)

"Rehabilitation of IDPs needs to be done on a war footing.... The task to rehabilitate millions of people is not easy but it can be made possible with a realistic assessment of the situation and a strong commitment to reverse it. This requires more coordinated efforts of the federal and provincial governments."

"Expansion Of The U.S. Embassy In Islamabad, And Jamaat-e-Islami's Protest," an editorial in the Lahore-based populist center-right Urdu daily "Khabrain" (cir. 50,000) (08/12)

"Jamaat-i-Islami Ameer Syed Munawar Hasan has said that turning the U.S. Embassy into a garrison in the guise of expansion is unacceptable. He said that his party would hold a protest on August 18 against this expansion and the arrival of U.S. Marines. He said the protest would spread throughout the country if the government does not take notice.... According to reports, about 1750 Marines are being called to Pakistan to protect the Embassy. There are several other doubts regarding the Embassy. Although the current construction is being termed as expansion, the kind of construction taking place there lends credibility to Munawar Hasan's statement that it is being turned into a garrison.... The arrival of U.S. Marines will pose a threat to Pakistan's nuclear assets due to the close proximity. Syed Munawar Hasan deserves praise for raising his voice on such a sensitive issue. The government must take note of this situation and allay the nation's concerns."

"Chaos And Neglect - National Drift," an op-ed by Shireen M. Mazari in the populist, often sensational national English daily "The News" (cir. 55,000) (08/12)

"The incident of the SHO being abused and threatened by a U.S. Embassy guard (or diplomat since he seemed to have that status) is just one incident. Imagine what will happen in Islamabad and across Pakistan with 1000 plus U.S. marines running loose all armed and oblivious to Pakistani law! Once again Holbrooke is arriving, no doubt to claim his pound of flesh for the drone attack against Baitullah! Already the U.S. seems to think that the Pakistani public will now cheer on the drone attacks regardless of the issues of sovereignty and collateral damage! Also, he is bound to pressure the army into beginning a full-scale conventional operation in FATA - which will be a disaster for us. Is he also going to pressure us further into accepting Black-water and CIA front groups across the

NWFP? Is he going to press us into allowing the 1000 plus marines into Islamabad and providing them immunity from the law of the land?"

"TTP At The Fork," an editorial in the country's premier business newspaper, "Business Recorder" (cir. 25,000) (08/12)

"No doubt in the death of the diminutive but powerful, Baitullah Mehsud - he was only five feet two inches in height - the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan has suffered a serious blow to its morale and unity, a situation likely to worsen, because the battle for succession is not expected to throw up any single winner. None of the wannabes has the charisma and credentials of their erstwhile leader to win over the loyalty of the identity-conscious Pakistani Taliban. Death of Baitullah Mehsud is the weakest moment in the life of the multi-group TTP."

"Suspicious Silence Over Drone Attacks," an editorial in the Karachi-based right-wing pro-Jamaat-e-Islami Urdu daily "Jasarat" (cir. 3,000) (08/12)

"The father-in-law, wife, and sister of Baitullah Mehsud (TTP chief) were killed in a recent drone strike, but the opposition parties in the Pakistan parliament are suspiciously silent over the issue. The parliament earlier had condemned the drone attacks, but the Pakistani ambassador to the U.S. kept on talking about the positive results these attacks have shown. The day may not be far away when the U.S. troops would land in Pakistan and can turn it into another Afghanistan or Iraq."

"Are Baitullah Mehsud And Hakeemullah Dead," an editorial in Hyderabad based liberal and independent Sindhi Daily "Ibrat" (cir. 80,000) (08/12)

"If the reports of Baitullah Mehsud's death are true, then it is a good news for the people of this country, as he was involved in killing of thousands of innocent Pakistanis."

"Separated At Birth," an op-ed by Mahir Ali in the Karachi-based center-left independent national English daily "Dawn" (cir. 55,000) (08/12)

"The probable decapitation of a leading faction of the Pakistani Taliban could be considered an auspicious augury in the run-up to the nation's Independence Day, although the delay obtaining confirmation of Baitullah Mehsud's demise also serves as a reminder that, notwithstanding their nomenclature, the tribal areas are not in any meaningful sense federally administered. At the time of writing, mystery also continued to surround the fate of rival claimants to Baitullah's blood-soaked mantle. These dramatic incidents were preceded by confusion over Islamabad's South Waziristan strategy, with a concerted military push in the Swat vein postponed amid persistent rumors - occasionally lamely denied - of backchannel contacts with Baitullah, apparently in an attempt to thrash out some sort of a deal. It is possible, of course, that the intent behind these contacts was more devious, the idea being to pinpoint the Taliban chieftains so that the coordinates could be passed on to the Americans."

"Terrorism Cannot Be Controlled Without Brainwashing The Misguided Elements," an editorial in the leading mass circulation populist, often sensational Urdu daily "Jang" (cir. 300,000) (08/12)

"As the terrorists won the minds and hearts of their naove operatives in the garb of religious conviction, therefore, it is also essential that the religious scholars and the enlightened clerics must persuade those misguided people and bring them back to the mainstream social order. Only a positive change of the mindset and attitude can make a difference, and we can triumph over extremism and fanaticism. Moreover, there is also need to bring out progressive literature in Pashto language to initiate a drive to reform our society. Poverty alleviation and more opportunities for jobs should be the cornerstone of this approach, as it is an established fact that poverty and joblessness can compel individuals to go into the terrorism fold."

"Taliban Supremacy In Afghanistan: U.S. General's Admission And Our National Interest," an editorial in the second-largest, center-right nationalist Urdu daily "Nawa-i-Waqt" (cir. 150,000) (08/12)

"In an interview with the Wall Street Journal, U.S. General Stanley McChrystal has admitted that the Taliban have gained supremacy in the Afghan war and have forced the U.S. to deploy troops in thickly populated areas.... General McChrystal's admission should be a cause of concern for the Pakistani government also, which -- continuing with Musharraf's pro-U.S. agenda -- is involving itself deeper into a war which the U.S. and Europeans seem to be losing... After the U.S. General's admission, Pakistan must also try to extricate itself from the U.S. war on terror."

(All circulation figures are based on estimation)  
Feierstein